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# CONSERVATION OF A LADY'S WRAP FROM THE HOWER HOUSE MUSEUM

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CONSERVATION OF A LADY'S WRAP FROM THE HOWER HOUSE MUSEUM

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## CONSERVATION OF A LADY'S WRAP FROM THE HOWER HOUSE COLLECTION

### Introduction

For my honors project, I decided to conserve a mid-1880's lady's wrap from the Grace Hower Crawford Costume Collection (see figures 1a and 1b). The collection is stored in the Hower House Museum which was built in 1871 by John Henry Hower and once served as the residence of the Hower family (White, 1). Blanche Hower, the wife of John Henry's second son Milton Otis, is believed to be the original owner of the garment that was conserved in this project (White, 1). Blanche and Milton married in 1880, and Blanche, being the young wife of a prominent wealthy businessman, probably was the female family member at that time who closely followed all the latest fashions (White, 30).

The combination of two factors served as the driving force behind the design of this honors conservation project. The first factor centered on the educational benefit of the project to myself as the student. The skills and knowledge needed to carry out textile conservation requires both mental and physical activity. Mental activity is required in the research and problem solving aspects of conservation, and physical activity is necessary to execute conservation on a textile. The second driving factor was the need for the project to benefit other people, and fulfilling that requirement is the public display of the conserved garment in Hower House for the enjoyment and education of its viewers. Visitors to Hower House will be able to feast upon the visual reality of the garment before them and learn something about conservation and its importance from the exhibit's corresponding descriptions. From concept to execution, the goal of this textile conservation project has been not only to develop my personal conservation skills but also to increase mine and other's knowledge of textile conservation.

The following conservation report documents the knowledge that was gained from the chosen garment's conservation. The report is broken down into sections that address the garment's condition before and after conservation. The pre-conservation analysis includes documentation of the garment's condition, historical evidence for determining the garment's date of origin, and failed attempts at conserving the garment. The post-conservation portion of the report indicates how conservation on the garment was conducted, specifies how to properly store the garment, and identifies additional conservation work that needs to be done on the garment. Each section of the conservation report serves as a record that future conservators can reference to gain knowledge about work that has been done on the garment.

### **Pre-Conservation Analysis**

#### **Description and Dating:**

The garment is a woman's black wool shoulder wrap and belongs to the Grace Hower Crawford Collection located at the Hower House Museum at 60 Fir Hill in Akron, Ohio. The wrap possesses the accession number HH.78.7.16 and also has attached to it a tag which indicates that the garment was dated by Cindy Fugo in 1992 to be from the 1880s. A search on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's website revealed two similarly styled wraps that have also been dated to be from the 1880s (see fig. 2a and 2b). With the decade of the garment's origin initially confirmed, an in depth search was conducted to determine a more precise date.

When attempting to date a garment, a conservator's greatest resource are images from the estimated time period of a garment's origin. Images serve as evidence in the case to determine a garment's date of origin by confirming similarities, or dissimilarities, between the image and the garment. During certain periods of history, such as the 1880s, images are in



Figure 1a. Front view of lady's wrap HH.78.7.16. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.



Figure 1b. Back view of lady's wrap HH.78.7.16. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.





Figure 2a. 1880s Wrap C.I.41.42.5. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Retrieved from <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/107739>



Figure 2b. Late 1880s Wrap C.I.37.3. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Retrieved from <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/105511>

greater abundance because of the quantity and popularity of printed material produced during that time. To establish a date some clues from the garment itself helped narrow the search. First, the garment is a piece of outerwear, meaning it was used only when the wearer needed additional warmth. Secondly, fibers from the exterior of the garment were confirmed under the microscope to be wool (see fig. 3), which is often used for its insulating properties. Both of these facts indicate that the garment was probably worn during the colder seasons of the year, fall and winter. With these facts as a guide, the image search was narrowed to fall and winter issues of pattern and fashion magazines from the 1880s.

Based upon the evidence found in two magazines from 1884, the garment from Hower House can more precisely be dated to be from the mid-1880s. In the 1884 fall and winter issue of *McCall's Bazar Glove-Fitting Patterns* are two illustrations of ladies' outerwear that are similar to that of the Hower House garment (see fig. 4a and 4b). In both illustrations, the garments are symmetrical in appearance, possess long front panels that extend beyond the length of the back, and have trim that dangles along the borders of the garment. While both the wrap and the mantle have many commonalities, they also differ from each other in small ways, such as the style of collar and type of trim. These differences serve as proof that small variations of the garment were permissible. For instance, the wrap in figure 4a has a short, standing collar with no trim, but the mantle in figure 4b has a small fall to its collar and some trim attached to its edge which is closer in style to that of the Hower House garment.

The second source used for dating the Hower House wool shoulder wrap is an image from Butterick's 1884 August issue of its fashion magazine, *The Delineator* (see fig. 5). Again, the silhouette is very similar to the Hower House garment but with variation in the choice of



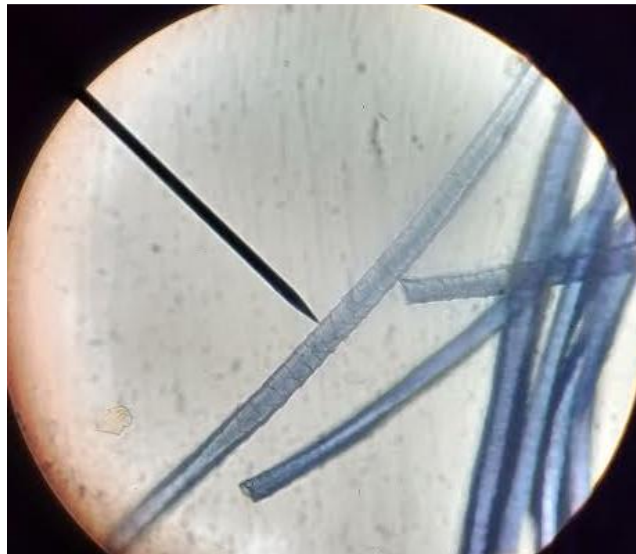


Figure 3. Microscopic image of fiber sample from exterior fabric of shoulder wrap.  
Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.



4a.



4b.

Figure 4a. Ladies Wrap. Source: *McCall's Bazar Glove-Fitting Patterns*, fall and winter 1884 issue, p. 5

Figure 4b. Lady's Mantle. Source: *McCall's Bazar Glove-Fitting Patterns*, fall and winter 1884 issue, p. 4

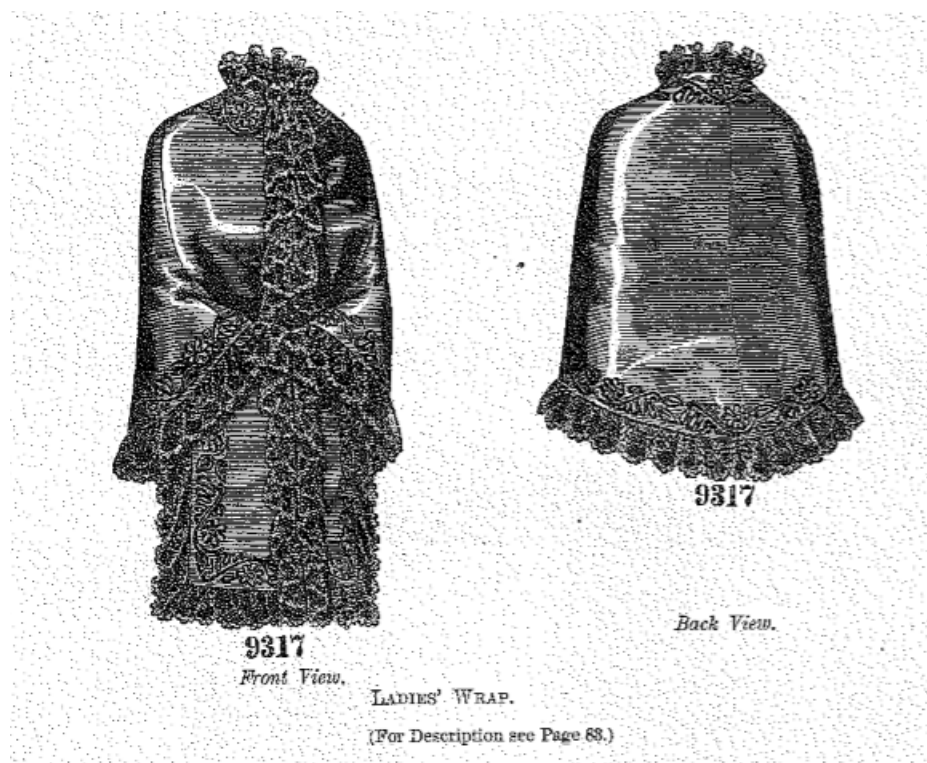


Figure 5. Ladies' Wrap. Source: *The Delineator*, Butterick 1884, p. 82.

trim and style of collar. In conjunction with the wrap's image is a written description in *The Delineator* of the materials that could be used to make the garment: "Any material in vogue for wraps may be made in this fashion, and chenille fringe, ruchings, galloons, braid or any garniture adapted to the fabric selected may be applied" (p. 83). Among the types of trims mentioned in the description is braid, which is the type of trim used on the Hower House garment. Although the silhouette, collar, and trim all appear in the magazines from 1884, it is impossible to say conclusively from this evidence that 1884 is the exact year that the Hower House garment was made. Therefore, based upon the corroborated evidence found in the two magazines, a more precise date of mid-1880s can be given to the Hower House garment.

#### Condition:

At first glance, the overall condition of the wool wrap appeared very good, but there were some visible damages upon closer inspection of the garment's exterior and interior (see fig. 6, 7, 8 and 9). The exterior has the most damages, including a small hole on the back that appears to have undergone some previous conservation effort. The small hole in the fabric has been stabilized to prevent the fabric from fraying further (see fig. 10). In addition, to the small hole near the back left seam, the wrap has several pin-sized holes at various locations on the front of the garment. The largest of these holes is located on the front left side near the top of the shoulder (see fig. 11). Also visible on the wrap's exterior is a faded area on the front right side just above the bust line. Additionally, there is an area of trim on the front left side several inches below the neckline where one of the cords of the trim has been dislodged from its original position (see fig. 12). The wrap's interior, which is lined with black cotton, only has two notable damages. The first being some threadbare spots where only the warp threads remain;

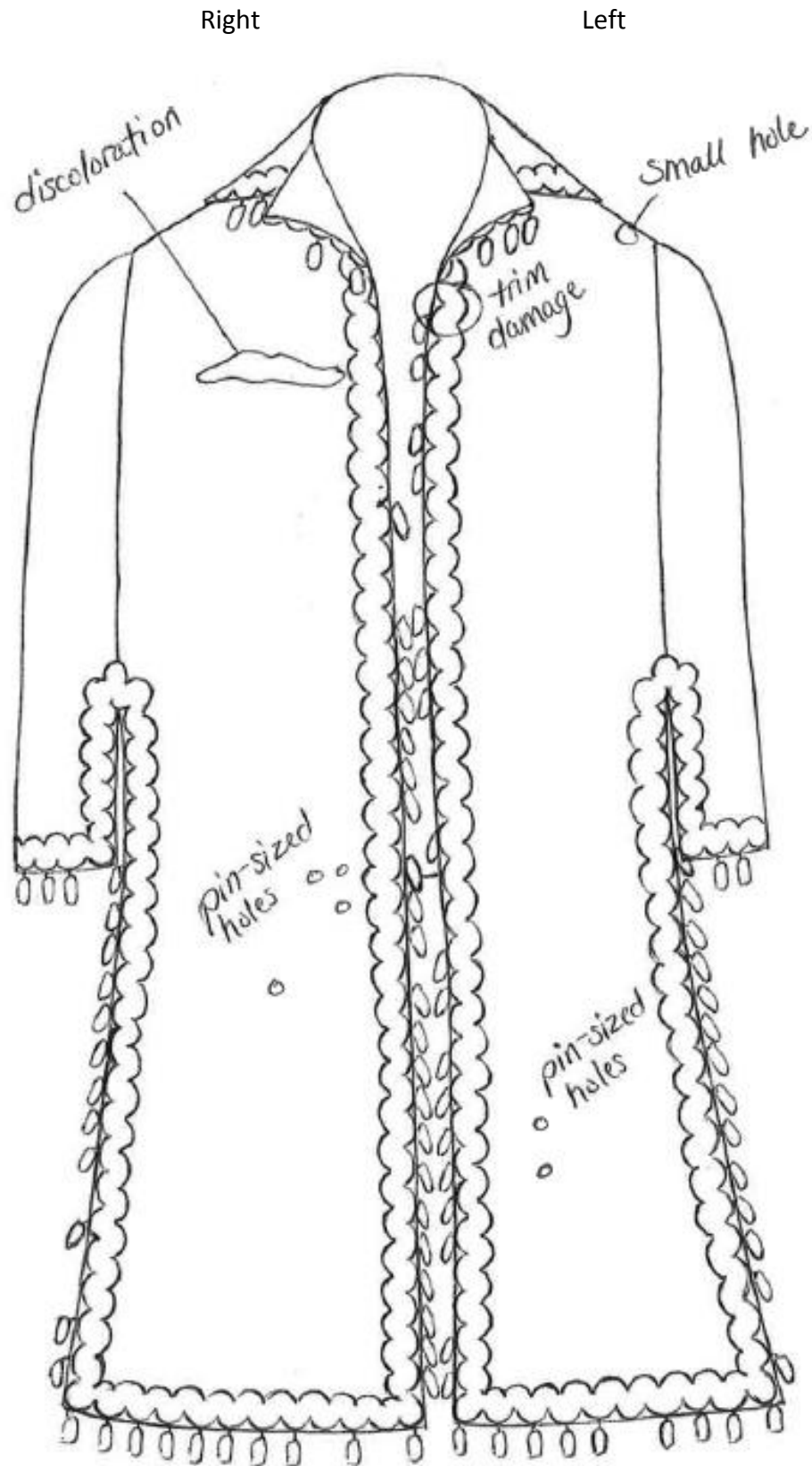


Figure 6. Front sketch of wrap exterior with damaged areas identified. By Natalie Mallinak.

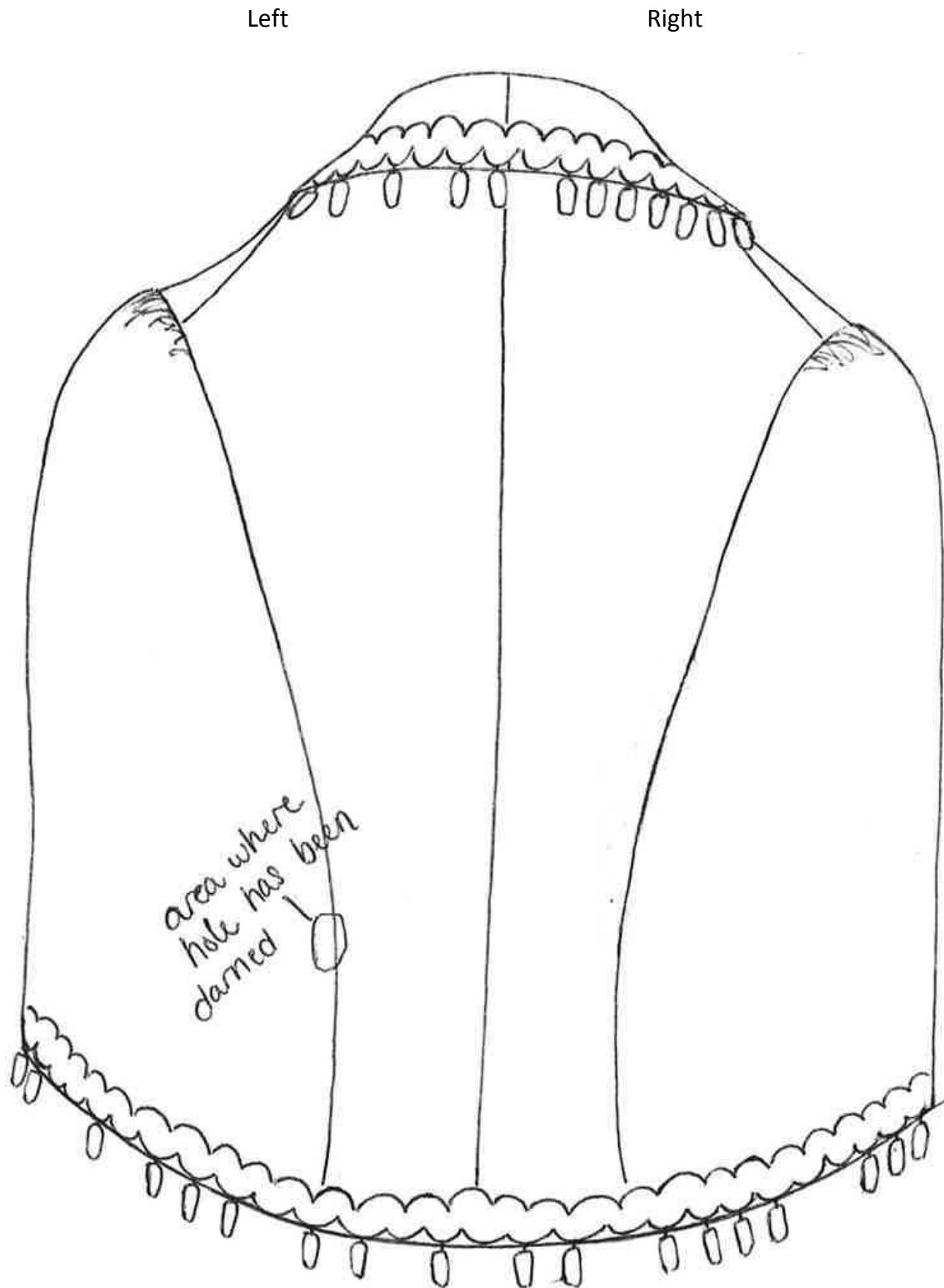


Figure 7. Back sketch of wrap exterior with damaged areas identified. By Natalie Mallinak.

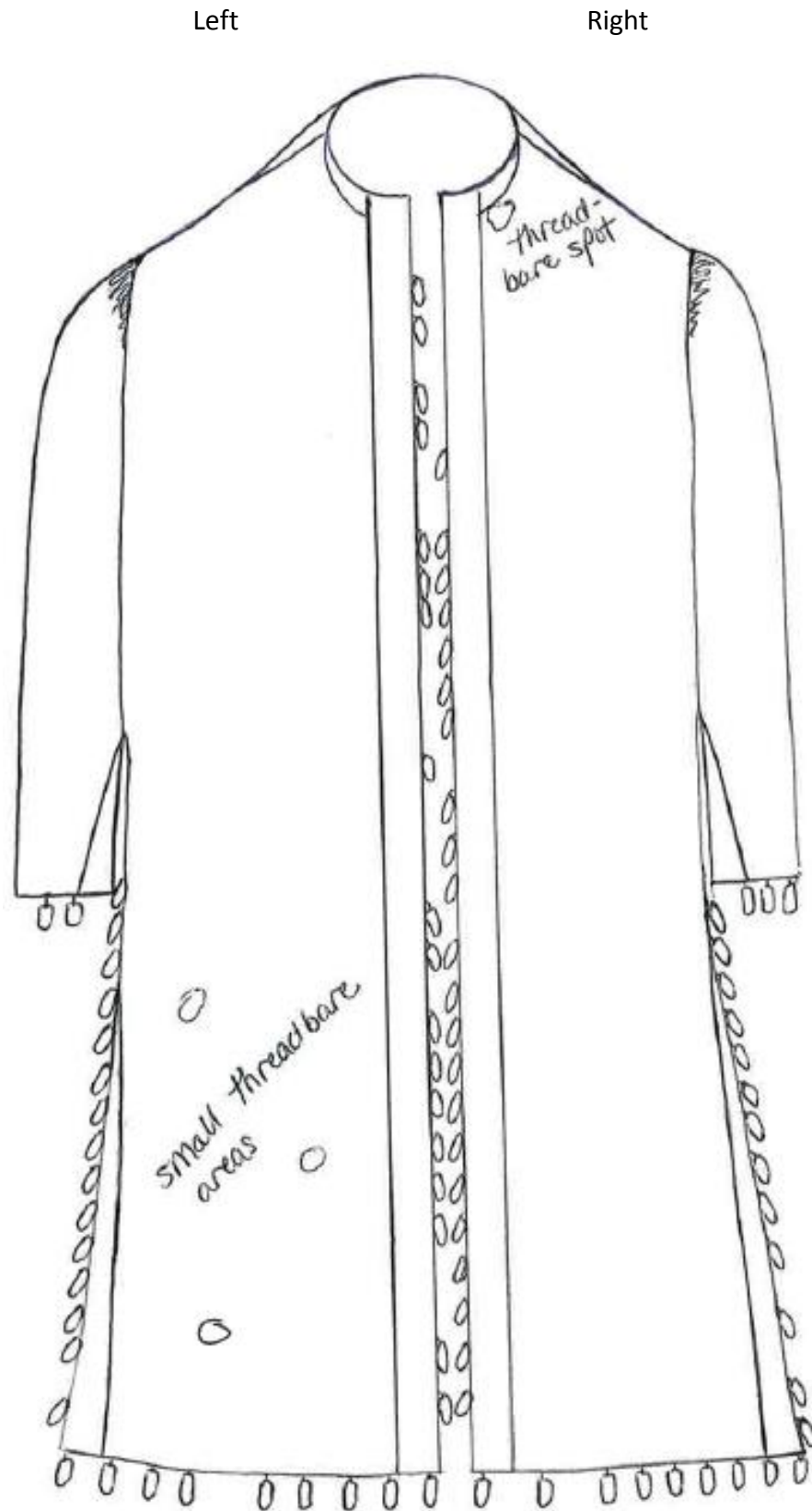


Figure 8. Front sketch of wrap lining with damaged areas identified. By Natalie Mallinak.



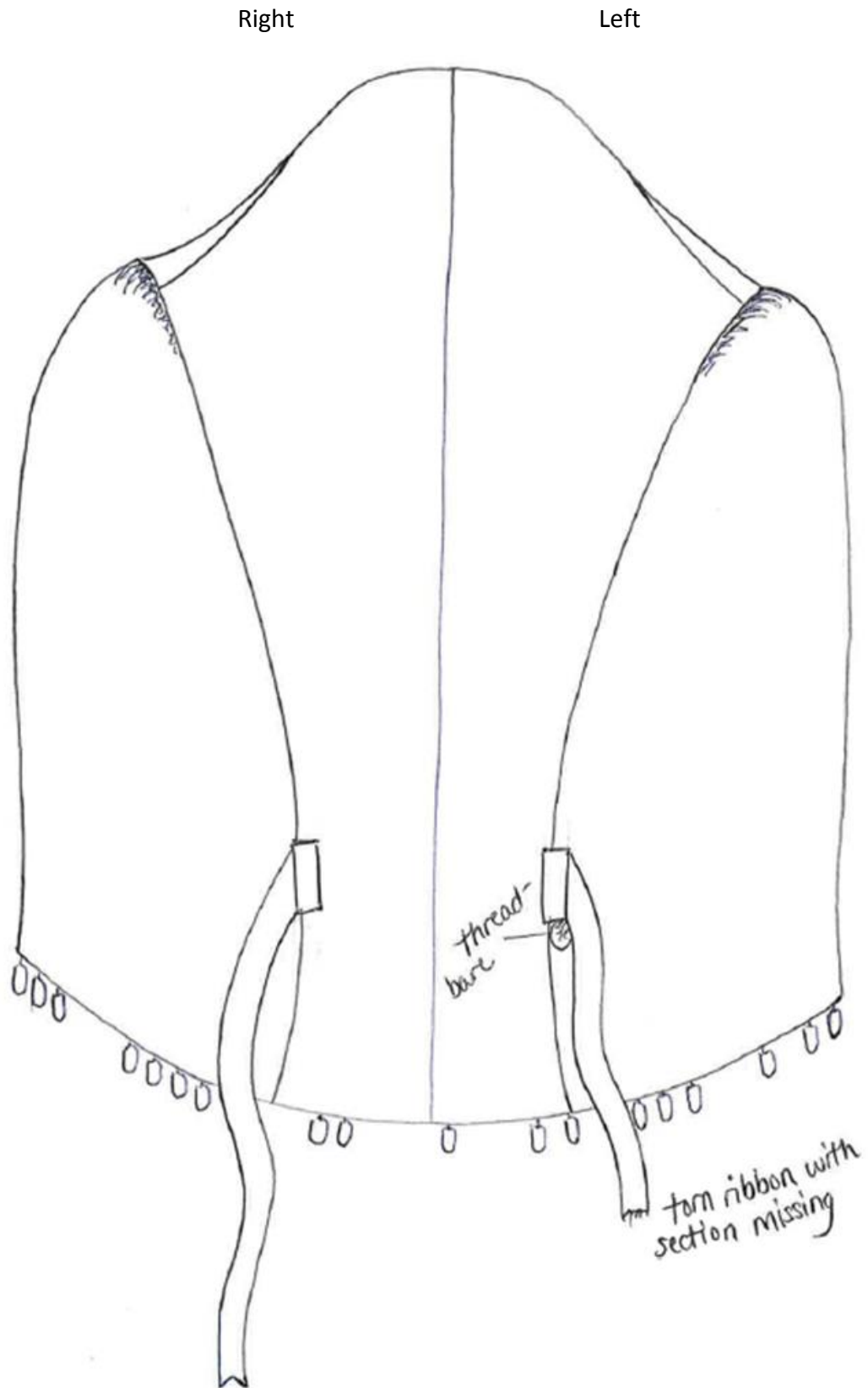


Figure 9. Back sketch of wrap lining with damaged areas identified. By Natalie Mallinak.



Figure 10. Repaired hole on lower back left seam. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.



Figure 11. Small hole on left shoulder. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.



Figure 12. Close up of damaged trim. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.

the largest of these threadbare areas is found near the back left seam where the ribbon waistband is attached (see fig. 13). The second being the ribbon waistband which is missing several inches of length on its left side. In spite of all these noted damages, none of them are preventing the garment from being publicly displayed.

The biggest concern in the garment's public display pertains to the stability of the bobbles hanging from the garment's trim (see fig. 14). The cotton thread that was originally used to attach the bobbles to the trim has become very weak, resulting in the detachment of many bobbles (see fig. 15). The trim itself consists of three cords that undulate in upward and downward curves resulting in a scalloped appearance. Along the trim's edge that matches garment's edge hang bobbles at inconsistent intervals. From observing and documenting the current placement of the bobbles on the garment, there is strong evidence that a bobble was originally present at every scallop of the trim along the edge of the garment. The reasons for this conclusion are founded upon the high frequency and regularity of bobbles still attached to the trim along the garment's left side farthest from the center-front line and the bits of broken thread where bobbles have fallen off. Figures 16 and 17 are sketches that document existing bobble locations which are numbered sequentially starting over at every corner with the number 1 and taking into account missing bobbles by gaps in the numbering. The garment was calculated to be missing a total of 73 bobbles, roughly 33 percent of the original number of bobbles. Of the remaining 146 bobbles, five are currently unattached, and one bobble attached at the collar is badly damaged (see fig. 18). With the placement and condition of the bobbles properly documented, the process of figuring out how to safely reinforce and reattach the bobbles began.





Figure 13. Threadbare spot on cotton lining. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.

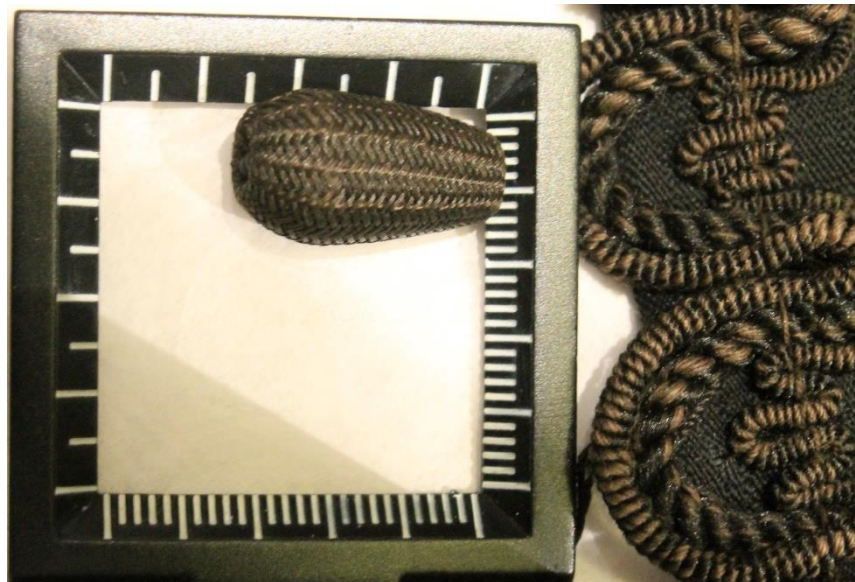


Figure 14. Bobble attached to trim. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.



Figure 15. Microscopic view of cotton thread originally used to secure bobbles. Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.



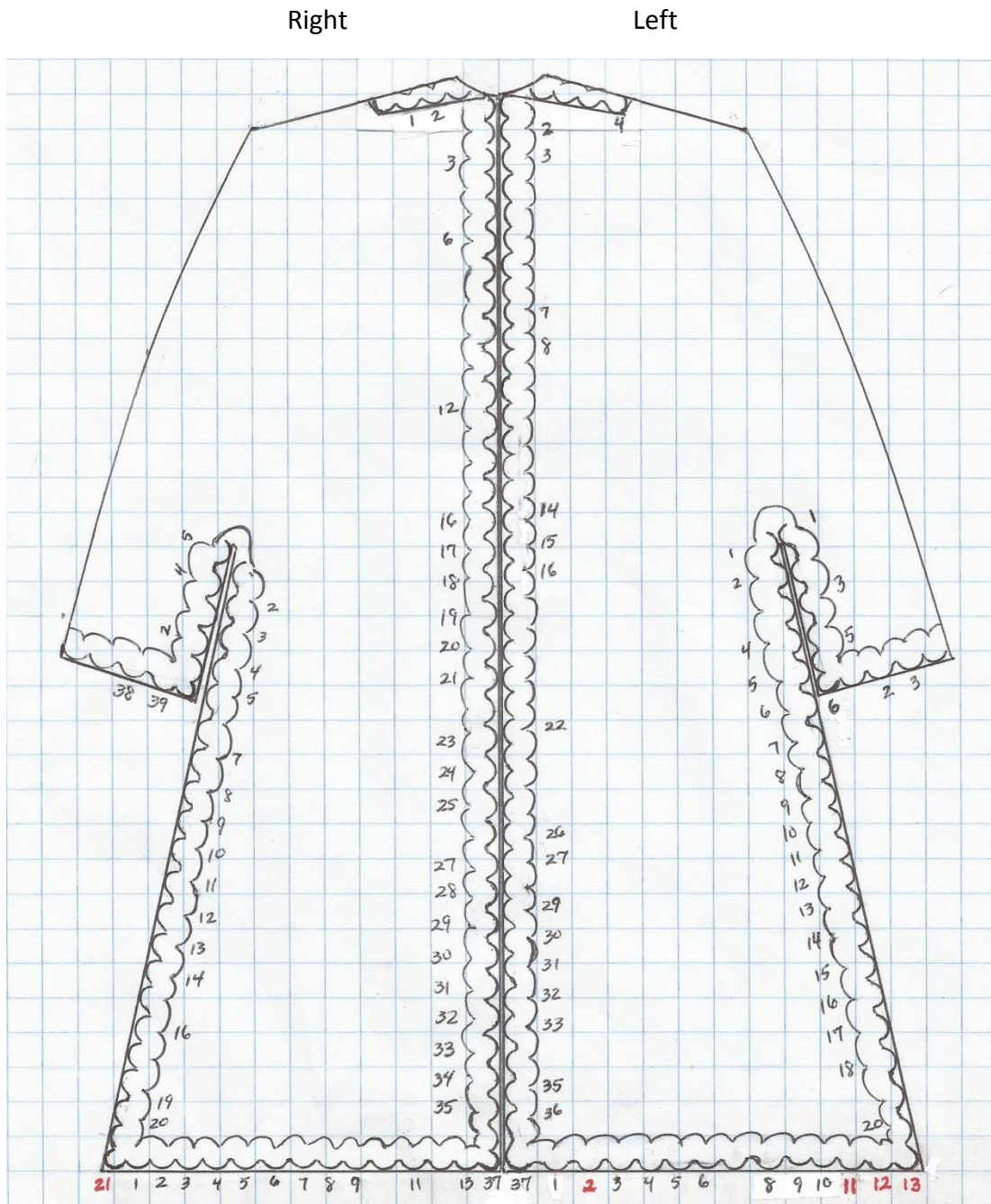


Figure 16. Diagram of bobble placement on wrap front. By Natalie Mallinak

Each number represents the placement of a bobble. The numbering of the bobbles starts over at every corner. The numbers in red represent the bobbles that were reattached during conservation.

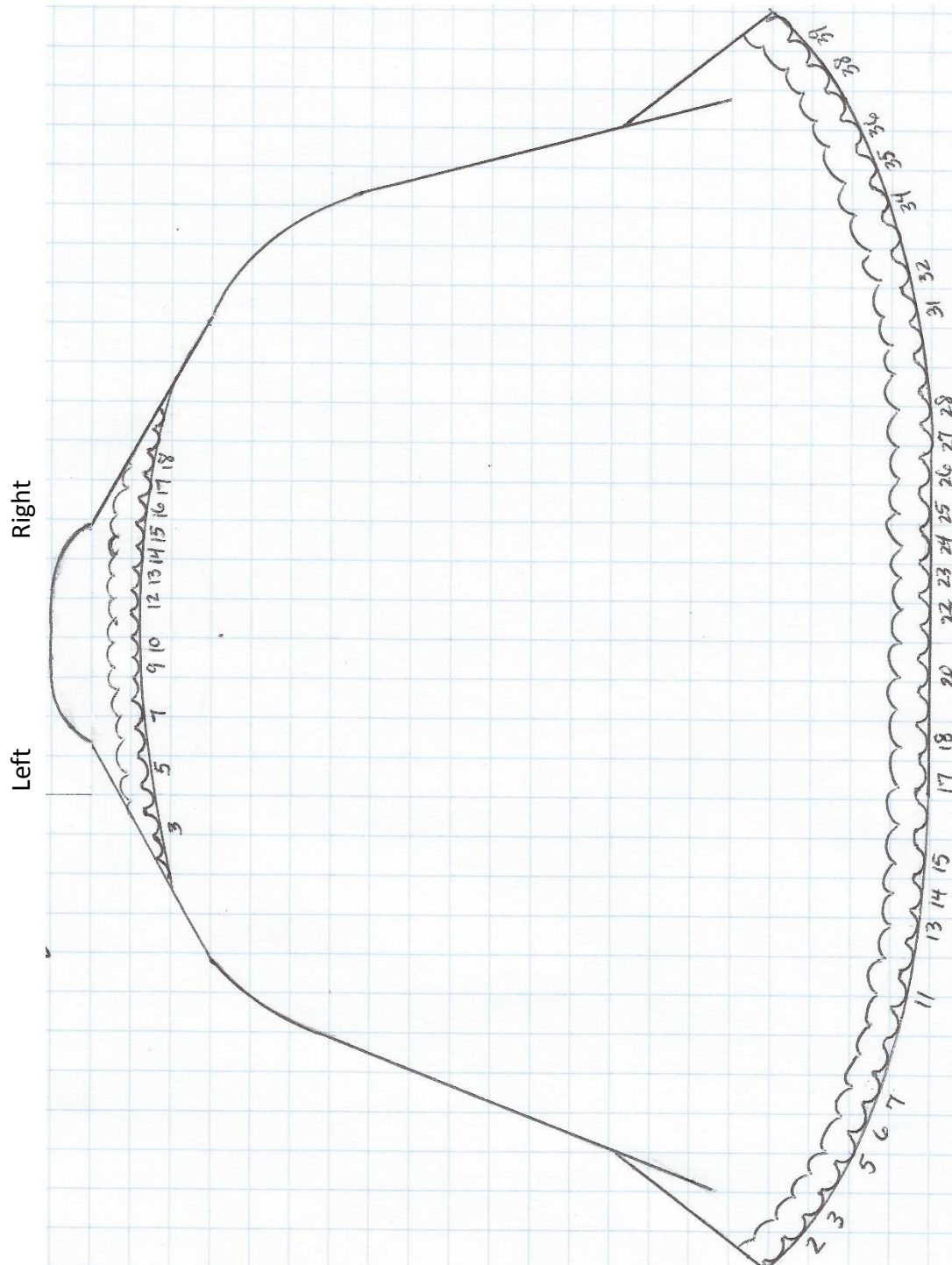


Figure 17. Diagram of bobble placement on wrap back. By Natalie Mallinak



Figure 18. Damaged bobble attached to collar. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.

### **Justification of Work**

Before deciding upon the method that would be used to reinforce and reattach the bobbles, I weighed the options of placement for the five unattached bobbles. Since one of the main goals of the conservation project was to make the wrap available for public display, I concluded that the two determining factors to consider for bobble reattachment were historic accuracy and aesthetic appearance. Achieving historic accuracy, in the case of this particular garment, simply meant reattaching unattached bobbles where bobbles originally hung. On the other hand, aesthetic appearance is implicitly subject to personal opinion. However, when considering the question from the perspective of the viewer and what portions of the garment he would be able to see when it is on display, a less subjective argument could be made for reattaching bobbles in a particular area. That area being the front of the garment because it would be the most visible portion of the garment when it is on display. The reason for the bobbles being reattached on the bottom of the front right and left panels is because at those locations the bobbles are most noticeable and therefore have the greatest impact upon the viewer while simultaneously restoring the historic look of the wrap. Unfortunately, there were fewer bobbles available than there were empty spaces on the bottom right and left panels, so I decided to distribute the bobbles so that there would not be two consecutive empty spaces where bobbles originally hung. With the placement of unattached bobbles determined, the actual method of reattachment and reinforcement could be explored.

The method of reinforcement and reattachment was not as simple and straightforward as deciding the placement of unattached bobbles. Several factors—the bobbles' safety, the original thread's safety, and the trim's safety—played a role in deciding what could and could

not be done. The conservation method needed to stabilize the bobbles without damaging them, the original cotton thread holding them, or the cords of the trim. Close observation of the trim revealed that the original cotton thread used to secure the bobbles to the trim was not the same thread used to secure the three cords of the trim together in a serpentine pattern, meaning that even if the cotton thread holding the bobbles continued to break, the trim itself would not be in danger of falling apart. Observation also revealed that the original method used to attach the bobbles to the trim was a continuous cotton thread that ran along the underside of the trim tracing its outline, went down into a bobble to snag a portion of the bobble's woven-mesh covering, exited back out of the top of the bobble where it had entered, and then re-entered the trim to repeat the same sequence all over again (see fig. 19). In an effort to remain historically accurate, the decision was made to follow the original thread path when reinforcing and reattaching the bobbles. The next decision was the choice of thread that would be used for the conservation. After weighing the options, I chose black silk thread because of its historic appropriateness: natural fibers were the only fibers available when the garment was originally made. Silk is also the smoothest and thinnest natural fiber with the highest tensile strength, so it could be doubled and still glide easily through the bobble and the cords of the trim without damaging either one. The color black was chosen because its color value is closest to the dark brown shade of the original cotton thread without being an exact match, allowing the conservation work to remain as discreet as possible.

The last but most difficult decision was how to secure the bobbles themselves. The first attempt to secure the bobbles was creating a large knot in the thread after it had passed through from the top to the bottom of the bobble so that it would lodge itself inside the



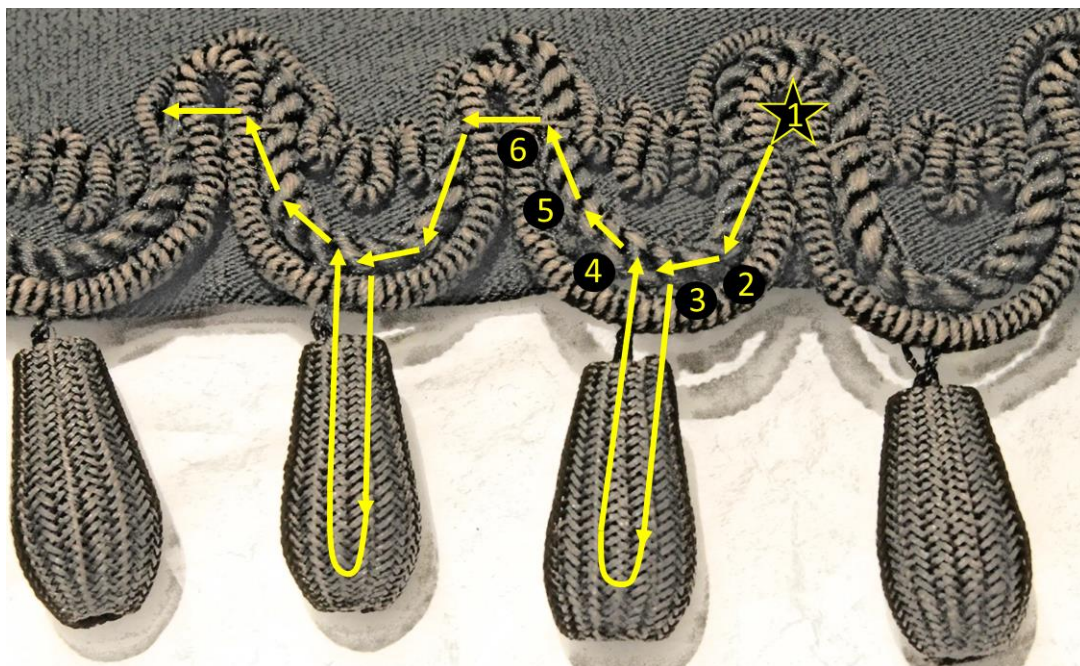


Figure 19. Original thread path. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed and illustrated by Natalie Mallinak.



bobble. However, this attempt failed in two ways; first, it was virtually impossible to form the knot on just the right location on the thread, and second, it was inefficient to create a knot large enough using just the thread itself. The concept for the conservation, though, did not have to be completely abandoned. All that needed to be done was to find a replacement for the failed knot. The next attempt, substituted the knot for a glass seed bead because seed beads are light weight and do not change size with fluctuations in temperature or humidity. In addition, seed beads are inexpensive and come in a variety of colors, so finding a similar color whose value was close to that of the bobble was easy. The attempt using the seed bead instead of the knot succeeded in securing the bobble. The illustration below shows the thread path that was taken to secure all the bobbles (see fig. 20), and the picture below shows the bottom of a bobble with a seed bead lodged inside, allowing it to remain hidden from obvious sight (see fig. 21).

### Summary of Time Spent on this Project

My time was used in the following ways on this project.

Date	Time	Activity Description
08-05-15	2 hr. 30 min	Digitize costume collection inventory
08-07-15	2 hr. 30 min	Digitize costume collection inventory
08-12-15	2 hr. 30 min	Digitize costume collection inventory
08-14-15	2 hr. 30 min	Digitize costume collection inventory
08-19-15	2 hr. 30 min	Digitize costume collection inventory
08-21-15	2 hr. 30 min	Digitize costume collection inventory
08-24-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
08-26-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
08-28-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection

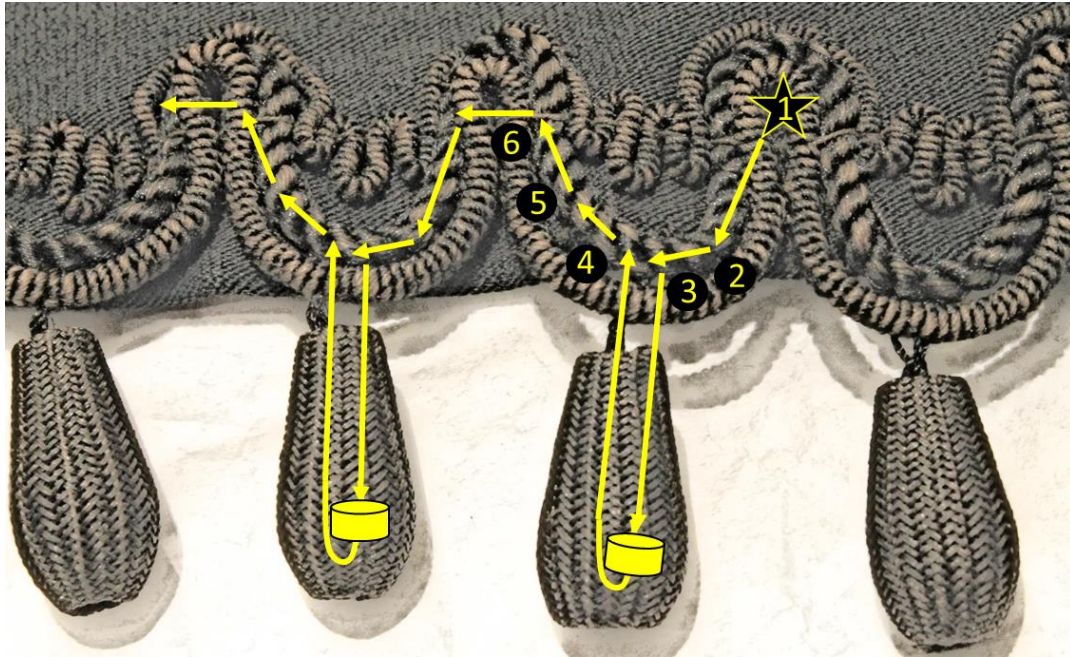


Figure 20. Thread path of conservation. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed and illustrated by Natalie Mallinak.

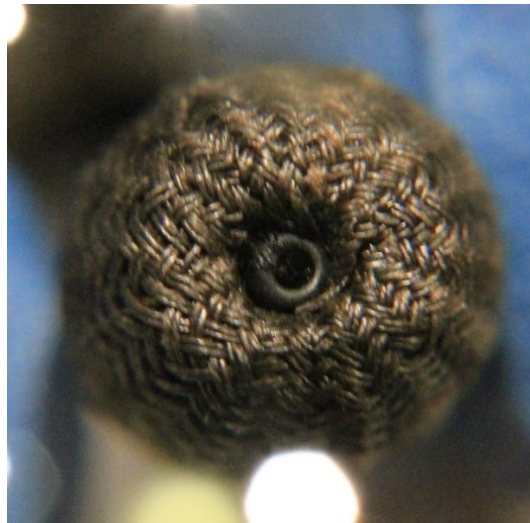


Figure 21. Bottom of bobble with seed bead lodged inside. Source: Hower House Museum, The University of Akron, Grace Hower Crawford Collection. Photographed by Natalie Mallinak.

08-31-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
09-02-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
09-07-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
09-09-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
09-14-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
09-16-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
09-21-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
09-23-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
09-28-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
09-30-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
10-05-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
10-07-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
10-12-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
10-14-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
10-19-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
10-21-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
10-26-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
10-28-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
11-02-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
11-04-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
11-09-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
11-11-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
11-16-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
11-18-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
11-23-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
11-30-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
12-07-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection

12-09-15	2 hr. 30 min	Re-house costume collection
02-19-16	1 hr. 30 min.	measured and sketched shoulder wrap
03-03-16	1 hr. 15 min.	documented placement of bobbles, determined structural integrity of trim was not in danger from broken thread that used to attach bobbles
04-05-16	2 hr.	attempted knotting method of reinforcement and attachment
04-06-16	1 hr. 30 min.	shopping for thread and seed beads
04-08-16	2 hr. 30 min.	sewing
04-12-16	2 hr.	sewing
04-14-16	2 hr. 50 min.	sewing
04-15-16	3 hr. 30 min.	sewing
04-22-16	2 hr. 15 min.	sewing
04-26-16	2 hr. 10 min.	sewing
04-27-16	4 hr. 35 min.	sewing
04-28-16	2 hr.	sewing
04-29-16	2 hr.	sewing
TOTAL CONSERVATION TIME		122 hr. 35 min

Using the dollar value of \$15.00 an hour for my time, the cost of conservation on this garment to this point would be \$457.50 without tax.

### Summary

Exhibition:

The wool shoulder wrap is a simple but elegant example of Victorian dress, and the only obstacle to its display for public enjoyment was the concern of more of its bobbles falling off or getting lost. The method and materials chosen for the conservation were a result of careful analysis of the trim and bobbles on the garment. Since all the bobbles are now secured, the conservation goal for the wrap has been successful in preparing it for public display while simultaneously remaining true to the wrap's original appearance. The conservation was also

successful because the garment's historicity was preserved through the choosing where bobbles have been reattached, mimicking the original thread path, and camouflaging evidence of the conservation. The wrap is now ready to be displayed for public viewing at Hower House.

#### Storage:

For storage, the wool wrap should be kept in an unbuffered garment archival box. The shoulders and sides should be padded with acid free paper on the interior of the wrap to prevent fold lines and creases from forming that would cause damage. Because the wrap's interior fabric is cotton and its exterior fabric is wool, different acid free paper should be used based upon the pH level of the fabric it is touching. The archival quality paper placed against the cotton lining of the garment should be buffered, but the archival quality paper touching the wool exterior should be unbuffered. The archival box containing the garment should be stored in a climate controlled room with little fluctuation in temperature and humidity. Although the wrap is in good condition, future conservation could include repairing the ribbon waistband and stabilizing the threadbare spots in the lining and holes on the exterior.

#### Final Thoughts:

I am so grateful to Hower House, Rebecca Wehr, Linda Bussey, and Dr. Virginia Gunn for giving me the opportunity to work on such a beautiful garment and to preserve a piece of history for public enjoyment. I learned so much from this small experience: the smallest details communicate important clues about a garment's story; one should never underestimate the time it takes to do a job well; one must be flexible and patient in navigating obstacles; and one must be open to changing preconceived notions.

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